

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 15364 101532Z

43

ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

----- 085592

R 101334Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4505

INFO DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 15364

EXDIS

E.O. 11652 XGDS-3 DECLAS 1990

TAGS: PFOR, MILI, UR, US

SUBJ: WOULD MOSCOW BLINK AGAIN?

REF: MOSCOW 15345

1. ONE OF QUESTIONS WHICH WE ADDRESSED BRIEFLY IN OUR ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET POLICY (REFTEL) WAS WHETHER MOSCOW WOULD BLINK IN THE EVENT OF ANOTHER MAJOR CONFRONTATION. THIS MESSAGE SPELS OUT THE EMBASSY'S SPECULATION ON THIS QUESTION.
2. THE U.S.-SOVIET NUCLEAR STANDOFF TENDS TO BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED. BUT THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER 23-25 SUGGEST THAT IT WOULD BE PRUDENT AGAIN TO EXAMINE OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SOVIET REACTIONS TO A DEVELOPING CRISIS.
3. THERE IS NO REASON TO QUESTION THE ASSUMPTION THAT MOSCOW PLACES THE HIGHEST PRI*RITY ON AVOIDING A NUCLEAR EXCHANGE. A QUESTION CAN BE RAISED HOWEVER ABOUT THE SOV*ET ASSESSMENT OF THE AMERICAN BLUFF QUOTIENT. IN 1962, THE RELATIVE NUCLEA* CAPACITIES OF THE TWO COUNTRIES LEFT LITTLE DOUBT WHOSE POSITION CONTAINED THE LARGEST ELEMENT OF BLUFF. IN 1973, NUCLEAR PARITY MAKES THE JUDGMENT OF WHO IS BLUFFING LESS A MATTER OF RELATIVE STRENGTH AND MORE A MATTER OF LESS EASILY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 15364 101532Z

MEASURED CONSIDERATIONS: WHOSE VITAL INTERESTS ARE

MOST AT STAKE AND DOMESTIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE STAKES, INCLUDING THE ELUSIVE ELEMENT OF NATIONAL (AND PERHAPS EVEN INSTITUTIONAL) PRESTIGE.

4. IN ATTEMPTING TO JUDGE HOW FAR THE U.S. WOULD GO IN DEFENDING ISRAEL, FOR EXAMPLE, SOVIET ANALYSTS WOULD HAVE TO BALANCE PRO-ISRAEL SENTIMENT IN THE U.S., THE U.S. NEED FOR CREDIBILITY, AND REPEATED OFFICIAL ASSURANCES TO ISRAEL, ON THE ONE HAND, AGAINST THE REMOTENESS OF ISRAEL, THE AMBIGUITY OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS INVOLVED, AND THE ABSENCE OF A FORMAL TREATY COMMITMENT ON THE OTHER. THEIR JUDGMENT MIGHT BE AFFECTED BY THE PRESENT SOVIET CONVENTIONAL WISDOM THAT THE U.S. IS TAKING ACCOUNT OF THE REALITIES OF GROWING SOVIET POWER AND THAT INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES ARE SAPPING THE U.S. ABILITY TO TAKE STRONG STANDS.

5. SOVIET POLITICAL LEADERS WOULD THEN HAVE TO STRIKE THEIR OWN BALANCE. THEY WOULD CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF A CONFRONTATION ON DETENTE AND LONGER-TERM SOVIET NEED TO DEMONSTRATE THE CREDIBILITY OF NUCLEAR PARITY AND TO ADVANCE MOSCOW'S INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST ON THE OTHER. THEY WOULD ALSO STACK UP SOVIET DESIDERATA AGAINST THE EXPERTS' JUDGMENT ABOUT HOW FAR THE AMERICANS WOULD GO BEFORE BACKING DOWN (AND IF THEY WOULD BACK DOWN AT ALL). THIS WOULD PROVIDE A BASIS FOR DECIDING HOW MUCH RISK WAS INVOLVED AND WHETHER THE STAKES WERE WORTH THE RISK.

6. OBVIOUSLY IT CANNOT BE DEDUCED IN ADVANCE WHAT THE SOVIET ASSESSMENT WOULD BE IN A GIVEN CASE. EVEN LOOKING BACK AT THE OCTOBER EVENTS IT IS NOT CLEAR, AT LEAST FROM THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE TO THE EMBASSY, WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE SOVIET REACTION TO THE U.S. ALERT IF THE ISRAELIS HAD CONTINUED TO MOVE TOWARD CAIRO ON OCTOBER 25. BUT WE WOULD SUGGEST SOME CONSIDERATIONS TO KEEP IN MIND IN PREDICTING SOVIET REACTIONS TO ANY FUTURE CONFRONTATIONS:

A. IT IS STILL A TRUISM THAT THEY WILL NOT BACK DOWN
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 15364 101532Z

IF THEY CONSIDER THEIR VITAL INTERESTS ARE INVOLVED
(E.G., EASTERN EUROPE).

B. IN AREAS WHICH THEY CONSIDER NOT VITAL TO AMERICAN INTERESTS THEY MAY BE MORE INCLINED THAN THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN TEN YEARS AGO TO THINK THE U.S. IS BLUFFING.

C. THE DOMINANT ELEMENTS OF THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP

PLACE A HIGH VALUE ON DETENTE AS PART OF THEIR LONG-TERM STRATEGY, BUT THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEY CAN (OR EVEN WISH TO) SUBORDINATE ALL OTHER IMPORTANT INTERESTS TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF DETENTE.

D. THERE MAY BE SOME LEADERSHIP ELEMENTS WHO WOULD WELCOME AN OPPORTUNITY TO RUB AMERICAN NOSES IN THE "REALITY" OF NUCLEAR PARITY. SUCH ELEMENTS MIGHT ARGUE THAT THIS WOULD BE USEFUL NOT ONLY FOR SOVIET CREDIBILITY BUT WOULD AID DETENTE BY INCULCATING A NEW SPIRIT OF HUMILITY IN THE U.S. VIEW OF DETENTE.

7. WE WISH TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THESE RATHER SOMBRE POSSIBILITIES NOT FOR THE PURPOSE OF WARNING AGAINST ANY ESCALATION TO THE CONFRONTATION STAGE WHEN THIS IS DICTATED BY VITAL AMERICAN INTERESTS, BUT MERELY TO SUGGEST THAT THE U.S. SHOULD NOT AUTOMATICALLY ASSUME THAT THE SOVIETS WILL BE QUICK TO BACK DOWN IN EVERY INSTANCE. AND WE WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE SITUATION WILL NOT NECESSARILY IMPROVE IN THE FUTURE, EVEN WITH CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT IN U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS. IF WE READ THE INTENTIONS OF THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP CORRECTLY, THEY ARE JUSTIFYING DETENTE ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP WILL ASSIST THEM IN ATTAINING THEIR OBJECTIVES; AND WHEN THE AMERICANS SEEM TO BE DRAGGING THEIR FEET, MOSCOW WILL NOT HESITATE, AS IT DID IN OCTOBER, TO PUT THE RELATIONSHIP TO THE TEST.
DUBS

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic DecapTIONing: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES, NUCLEAR STALEMATE, NUCLEAR WARFARE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 DEC 1973
DecapTION Date: 28 MAY 2004
DecapTION Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: garlanwa
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973MOSCOW15364
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X3
Errors: N/A
Film Number: P750033-1375
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19731233/aaaaaycv.tel
Line Count: 144
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 73 MOSCOW 15345
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: garlanwa
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 SEP 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27-Sep-2001 by martinml>; APPROVED <05-Dec-2001 by garlanwa>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WOULD MOSCOW BLINK AGAIN?
TAGS: PFOR, MILI, PARM, UR, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005